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ABSTRACT

From a political standpoint, the battle over sexuality education is not simply a dispute over the most effective means to promote the sexual and reproductive health of youth; but rather, a clash over the shape and direction of society itself. (McKay, 1999). This paper explores the theoretical underpinnings of the debate over the content and scope of formal sex education in schools in liberal democratic society, with a particular focus on the United States. The debate often pits parents with deeply held religious convictions and fairly conservative understandings of human sexuality against more secular-minded citizens, who are often resentful of what they perceive as an attempt by the former to erase the boundary between church and state. The paper argues that this policy debate is a manifestation of a deeper conflict between adherents to two comprehensive moral doctrines: (1) Millian individualist liberalism; and (2) natural law. It contends that, while there are serious and important differences between these two doctrines, their shared appreciation for individual liberty, autonomy, and equality makes feasible a kind of overlapping consensus about the value of sex education and the manner in which children and adolescents ought to be educated about sex. Although this consensus is likely not unanimous, it demonstrates that by drawing on two distinct and sometimes competing political moral traditions, a controversial public policy may in principle warrant wider support, and benefit from diverse ideological viewpoints. (Contains 97 notes.) (BT)

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Sex Education, Liberalism, and Natural Law:
Toward an Overlapping Consensus

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Love is the answer - but while you're waiting for the answer, sex raises some pretty good questions.
Woody Allen

The way that sexuality is regarded is often indicative of larger, overarching beliefs about what it means to be a moral agent, a happy person, a responsible citizen, and a free human being. Hence, discussions about human sexuality tend to be riddled with ideological assumptions, unarticulated values, and heavily moralized reasoning. It is no surprise, then, that from a political standpoint, "the battle over sexuality education is not simply a dispute over the most effective means to promote the sexual and reproductive health of youth, but rather it is, first and foremost, a clash over the shape and direction of society itself."[1]

In this paper, I explore the theoretical underpinnings of the debate over the content and scope of formal sex education in schools in liberal democratic society, with a particular focus on the United States. This debate often pits parents with deeply held religious convictions and fairly conservative understandings of human sexuality against more secular-minded citizens who are often resentful of what they perceive to be an attempt by the former to erase the boundary between church and state. Traditionally-minded parents, on the other hand, express anxiety and fear over the permeation of moral relativism and loosening sexual norms in their children's classrooms.

I argue that this policy debate is a manifestation of a deeper conflict between adherents to two comprehensive moral doctrines: Millian individualist liberalism and natural law. While there are serious and important differences between these two doctrines, I contend that their shared appreciation for individual liberty, autonomy, and equality makes feasible a kind of overlapping consensus about the value of sex education and the manner in which children and adolescents ought to be educated about sex. While this consensus surely will not be unanimous, it demonstrates that by drawing on two distinct and sometimes competing political moral traditions,

a controversial public policy may in principle warrant wider support, and benefit from diverse ideological viewpoints, than previously acknowledged.

Today, there is wide agreement that educating young people about sex is an important, even indispensable, task. In the past, the provision of sex education fell squarely on the shoulders of parents (and sometimes the church), whose talks about "the birds and the bees" exhibited varying degrees of detail, timeliness, and accuracy. However, while families continue to play a significant role in educating their children about sex, the vast majority of Americans now believe that formal sex education via the schools is an effective and necessary tool,[2] primarily due to alarmingly high rates of teen pregnancy and STD/HIV transmission.[3] Youthful indiscretions can result in serious consequences for boys and girls, with African-American teens being disproportionately affected.[4] Our popular culture and the media seem to exacerbate the problem, profiting by exploiting sexuality, presenting coarse images of what makes a man or woman sexy and desirable, presenting teens and adolescents as sexy and sexual,[5] and coupling the idea of instant sexual gratification with instant consumer gratification. Even our schools are often not the

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[1] McKay, Alexander. *Sexual Ideology and Schooling: Towards Democratic Sexuality Education* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 13.

[2] A 1991 Gallup poll showed that 87% of Americans support school sex ed. McKay, 28. A more recent poll conducted by Kaiser in 1999 indicates that the numbers may be even higher. Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. "National study on Sex Educ Reveals Gaps Between what Parents Want and Schools Teach," September 26, 2000, 1.

[3] Since the 1980's, the U.S. has had the highest teen pregnancy rate among developed countries, and, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, on average three million cases of STDs are reported among American teenagers annually. Rhode, D. "Adolescent Pregnancy and Public Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 108 (1993-4), 649-50. Koch, Kathy. "Encouraging Teen Abstinence: Should Birth Control Information be Taboo?" *CQ Researcher*, Volume 8 (1998), 581.

[4] According to 1996 statistics, black girls are nearly three times more likely to become pregnant than white girls and three times as likely to end their pregnancies in abortion (Darroch, J and S. Singh. "Why is Teenage Pregnancy Declining? The Roles of Abstinence, Sexual Activity and Contraceptive Use," The Alan Guttmacher Institute, Occasional Report No. 1, December 1999, 20). Moreover, blacks account for nearly half of all reported adolescent AIDS cases (Boonstra, Heather. "Legislators Craft Alternative Vision of Sex Education to Counter Abstinence-Only Drive," *The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy*, Number 2, 2002, 1).

[5] Consider, for example, the controversial Calvin Klein print and T.V. ads, which seemed to depict virtually prepubescent boys and girls on the set of a 1960's pornographic film. The commercials were seen by many as exploitative and overly suggestive (rightly so since some of the models were barely 15). One girl, for example, begins to undress as an off-camera voice complements here and asks her not to be nervous. Media Awareness Network, "Calvin Klein: A Case Study," http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/handouts/ethics/calvin_klein_case_study.cfm, 7/25/03.

safe-havens we wish them to be, but too frequently are best characterized as highly "competitive, aggressive and sexualised."[6] This, in part, is why arguments about eliminating or heavily censoring sex education in order to protect children's "innocence" fall flat; locker rooms, bathrooms, playgrounds, hallways, and even classrooms are already sexually charged environments.

A growing number of citizens suggest that in order to address these concerns, educators and parents need to go beyond mere fact dissemination and address youth immorality or, as Allan Bloom would put it, the impoverished souls of today's students.[7] The public controversy that has emerged in the face of value-free "scientific" approaches to sex education on the one hand and, on the other, attempts to instill in the young a kind of sexual decency based on adherence to clear moral principles, is hardly new. In fact, concerns over physical hygiene and social purity provided the rationale for the first discussions of sex education in the United States, as well as other western countries such as the U.K. and Australia. It would seem, then, that today's tug of war over whether sex education should be used as a vehicle for the protection of public health or for the protection of public morals is not a significant departure from the dual approaches of the past. However, unlike today, in the past the scientific and traditional moralistic approach were often intertwined, forming a marriage of sorts designed to reduce sexual promiscuity (and the births and diseases linked with it) by way of scientific reasoning.[8]

It was with the emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the mid-eighties that sex education began to show familiar signs of the modern controversy that surrounds the subject. Some, who I label *anti-traditionalists*, suggested that sex education needed to become far more explicit, moving somewhat away from a family values paradigm and toward an approach that

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[6] Measor, Lynda, Coralie Tiffin, and Katrina Miller. *Young People's Views on Sex Education: Education, Attitudes and Behaviour* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2000), 86.
[7] Bloom, A. *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

emphasized hard science, medical facts, and information about various contraceptive devices in the classroom setting. *Traditionalists*, often motivated by Christian sexual morality, reacted against this move, suggesting that if we are to have formal sex education, it ought to emphasize "continence and chastity"[9] as the best means of countering the spreading epidemic. Teaching that abstinence was the only option, in this view, was the only acceptable option. The marriage between science and health on the one hand, and traditional morality on the other, became strained and soon deteriorated. Former partners now became adversaries in a debate over the purpose, meaning, content, and design of sex education. The traditionalist versus anti-traditionalist feud,[10] born out of the clash of Victorian values with shifting sexual practices, was recast as a battle between truth and deceit, knowledge and innocence, and, at its most rhetorically divisive, good and evil.

Traditionalism vs. Anti-Traditionalism: A Brief Examination

Traditionalist ideology is typically (but not always)[11] forwarded by deeply devout Christians whose perspectives tend to reflect the Augustinian linkage of sexual desire with the failings of the human condition. In this view, man's inability to resist temptation and subsequent fall from grace are made manifest in the earthly world by the presence of sexual desire, which serves as a symbolic reminder of humanity's moral frailty and lack of self-discipline. One's inability to restrain one's sexual desires aligns us more closely with animals and disables the self "from flowing upward towards God."[12] While one can never entirely rid oneself of sin, the moral human being will regulate his or her sexual impulses and "sordid animality"[13] as much as is

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[8] For a thorough and insightful discussion concerning the historical development of sex education in the United States, see Moran, Jeffrey P. *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[9] Measor, 19.

[10] I shall treat these two poles, *traditionalism* and *anti-traditionalism*, which are the outgrowth of the public controversies of the past, as ideal types since each ideological camp has its own more moderate and more radical strands.

[11] Many of the attitudes of traditionalists can be evidenced in arguments against sex education put forth by Orthodox Jews and Muslims, for example.

[12] McKay, 39.

[13] Moran, 7.

possible. Women, in particular, are expected to embody the ideal of anti-sexual morality as "keepers of the morals, makers of the family, and upholders of the faith."[14]

A moral society, then, is one that actively assists human beings in the task of sexual restraint through, for example, regulatory laws, education, religious training, and so forth. The best way to suppress human beings' "insistent carnality,"[15] from this standpoint, is to insist that moral sex only occurs within the confines of heterosexual marriage and should be conducted within that arrangement primarily for the purpose of reproduction. In this way, the sexual act is seen as a procreative tool rather than as a means of fulfilling pleasure, intimacy, or desire. Non-reproductive and non-marital sexual behaviors (e.g. homosexual acts, masturbation, and oral sex) are deemed inherently sinful.[16] Masturbation is deemed particularly abhorrent in that its sole goal is physical self-gratification, a far cry from what is perceived to be the profound and even sacred experience of procreative sex.

While traditionalist ideology suffered a setback in the 1960's with the large-scale introduction of the birth control pill, which made so-called recreational sex (i.e. sex without the intention or consequence of pregnancy) possible, it has seen a resurgence in recent decades due to discontent and frustration with the sharp rise in divorce rates, single motherhood, sexual activity among youth, legalization of abortion, and the AIDS epidemic, all of which are perceived to be consequences of the relaxation of sexual inhibitions during the sixties and seventies. In particular, increasing concern over the erosion of family values has led to a renewed emphasis on marriage as the only appropriate sphere for the acting out of sexual behavior and the suspicion that schools are failing to relay this message adequately in the sex ed classroom. Traditionalists argue that sex educators are subjecting children to permissive notions of sexuality which throw into doubt traditional notions of marriage and family and undermine the very foundation of

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[14] Szirom, Tricia. *Teaching Gender? Sex Education and Sexual Stereotypes* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 36.
[15] Moran, 8.

civilization. What is needed, instead, are clear ethical directives in order to guide children who have been "starved on a diet of moral relativism"[17] in mainstream society and schools. Accordingly, traditionalists argue that if there is to be sex education within the schools, its central purpose should be "to recommend self-control over the force within in order to ensure the survival of the marriage bond, the family, and by extension society itself, from collapse."[18]

Anti-traditionalists, as the name suggests, question the rigid moral conformity in the sexual sphere that is advocated by traditionalists and, often, the social structure that supports that view. Many of them argue, against the Christian/Victorian ethos, that such conformity only serves to perpetuate unjust social hierarchies, such as the privileging of heterosexuality over homosexuality, married life over singlehood, motherhood over female economic independence, and male power over women's needs. More than a hint of the left-leaning rallying issues of the late sixties and early seventies is evident in the topics anti-traditionalists tend to focus on and the policy positions they advocate. Like the child liberationists of the sixties and seventies,[19] but with a greater degree of realism, many anti-traditionalists seek to free adolescents and teenagers from a smothering sexual morality that, in their view, only succeeds in achieving its aims by hampering individuality, restricting choice, and creating cookie-cutter human beings who may abide by social standards but do so at the price of their own sexual liberty.

Anti-traditionalists often contrast their approach to sexuality with what they consider to be the heavily moralized approach of the traditionalists. In their view, sexuality ought to be extracted from the realm of metaphysics and religion and viewed as a natural fact of human life,

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[16] Archard, D. "How Should We Teach Sex?" *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Volume 32 (1998), 438.
[17] Phelps, S. "Selling Out Our Kids: Bad Medicine from the American Medical Association," Project Reality, www.projectreality.org., 2.
[18] Meredith, P. *Sex Education: Political Issues in Britain and Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 45.
[19] Child liberationists saw childhood incompetency as an ideological construction manufactured by adults. Viewing schools and families as obstacles, rather than conduits, to children's autonomous development, the most radical child liberationists argued that children should be granted the right to vote, work, own property, choose guardians (they are not simply to be "stuck" with their parents), and control their own sexuality. The political marginalization of children was not a necessary state of affairs; the full spectrum of

one that is not regrettable and even inherently good. Sexuality is treated as a key component of a healthful, happy, fulfilling life. Rejecting the "act-centred sexual ethics"[20] of traditionalists, in which specific sexual acts (most notably those occurring outside of heterosexual, marital relationships and/or involving non-coital sexual activity) are subject to moral review and condemnation, anti-traditionalists wish to widen the scope of what is considered moral sexual behavior and rely on a "person-centred sexual ethics"[21] that is concerned with physical and psychological health instead of morals. Sexual activity among consenting individuals (gay or straight, married or single) is removed from the traditionalist paradigm of guilt, shame, disapproval, and restraint.

However, both traditionalists and anti-traditionalists forward moralized visions of sexuality. While traditionalist sexual ideology rests on a religious/restrictive morality, anti-traditionalist sexual ideology is also clearly reliant on morality, albeit of a particularly liberal egalitarian kind – one that emphasizes a particularly individualist view of freedom and equality. Often it is infused with the moral hopes of the sexual revolution and the feminist underpinnings that bolstered it. When anti-traditionalists talk about what constitutes acceptable sexual behavior, they use terms like fairness and honesty, consent and deliberation, mutual respect, and equality. Sex is thought to be good or bad to the degree that it is mutually wanted and non-exploitative. Some anti-traditionalist feminists go further, emphasizing the connection between sex and emotion, love, intimacy, and even spirituality. While one might have a decided preference for one of the sexual ideologies described here, it is evident that neither side views sex as an amoral activity. Acknowledging this has real consequences for those who suggest that sex education ought to be taught from a value-neutral standpoint.

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adult rights simply ought to be extended to all citizens, regardless of age. See for example, John Holt's *Escape from Childhood: The Needs and Rights of Children* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1974).

[20] McKay, 50.

[21] McKay, 57.

Sex education cannot and should not be value-free. It *cannot* be in the sense that values are always transmitted, knowingly or not, by educators who, after all, are human beings with their own biographies, beliefs, and decided preferences. The hidden curriculum[22] transmits "messages which contradict at a preconscious level the intentions publicly avowed"[23] even when mindful teachers make their best efforts to create value-neutral environments. It *should* not be value-free because, as one traditionalist notes, "Even the attempt to teach [sex education] without values attaches a value to it...The value is that all varieties of sexual and social behavior are of equal validity."[24] This leads some traditionalists to fear that children will be asked to choose from "a buffet of competing moral systems,"[25] with little guidance about which is better or worse. Anti-traditionalists, too, should find little favor with value-free sex education since the values they seek to advocate (e.g. equality, fairness, honesty, respect, etc.) would also be absent or greatly diluted in such a curriculum.

Whose values ought to win the day in the sex education classroom? Which moral framework can succeed in protecting children's interests and rights while not alienating parents and families with diverse moral outlooks? How can sex education respond to what many have characterized as incommensurable moral and religious perspectives? Both traditionalists and anti-traditionalists believe in the righteousness and truthfulness of their respective ideological positions. Anti-traditionalists see it as self-evident that men and women are equal, that women have the right to control their own bodies, that homosexuals are not deviant, and that sex is a natural, healthy, and positive realm of life, one that need not be burdened by excessive rules and regulations. Traditionalists, particularly those who are highly devout, believe that their moral prescriptions for sexuality are grounded in fundamental and objective truths. Their views seem

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[22] The hidden curriculum refers to the way that school structure and classroom routines, as well as the attitudes, behaviors, and interactions of teachers, administrators, and students, subtly combine in ways that are not readily apparent to influence what and how students learn.

[23] Szirom, 57.

[24] Quoted in Zimmerman, Jonathan. *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 188-9.

especially incompatible with those of others because, for example, a metaphysical perspective that understands eternity in hell to be the consequence of casual or immoral sexual behavior can find little comfort in the "now"-oriented anti-traditionalist paradigm. In short, the ideologies of anti-traditionalists and traditionalists appear to be incommensurable in that each view "presupposes the invalidity of the other."[26]

At this point, the skeptical reader might wonder how such a deep ideological cavity can be overcome. I want to suggest that the policy debate between anti-traditionalists and traditionalists regarding what, when, and how schools should teach young people about sex is actually a manifestation of a deeper conflict between divergent conceptions of the good society held by those who align themselves with a robust form of liberal individualism and adherents to the natural law tradition. I begin by considering the autonomy-promoting liberal position embodied in the thought of John Stuart Mill. I then go on to examine the conception of the moral society and the moral human being put forth by the natural law theorist, Robert P. George. I hope to present the most attractive case for each opposing perspective in order to determine to what extent each position is vindicated by the requirements of a just sex education program for child citizens in liberal democratic society and to what extent an overlapping consensus is possible.

Mill, Freedom of Choice, and Sexual Autonomy

John Stuart Mill, more than any other political philosopher, presents liberals with the most persuasive argument in favor of a robust respect for choice, including choice in sexual matters, at nearly all costs. It is captured in his now famous harm principle, which hinges on the concepts of self-regarding and other-regarding behavior. Self-regarding behavior is at the heart of Mill's understanding of liberty and his advocacy of personal autonomy.[27] The spirit of the idea is captured most powerfully in the following passage:

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[25] Moran, 162.
[26] Zimmerman, 215.
[27] Autonomy is a cardinal goal of liberalism. I understand autonomy to be an individual's capacity to form a conception of the good, to investigate truth claims and reflect independently, self-consciously, and

> [T]he sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise or even right...Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.[28]

Mill's principle is opposed, in an absolute sense,[29] to any form of state paternalism, except where paternalism involves the state's dealings with children or the mentally disabled. Choice, for Mill, is not merely a right individuals are owed, but is inextricably linked to our humanity since "to conform to custom merely *as* custom does not educate or develop in [the individual] any of the qualities which are the distinctive endowment of a human being. The human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference are exercised only in making a choice."[30] Simply put, the denial of choice constitutes the denial of what makes an individual distinctively human.

This sovereignty or self-rule is central to the integrity of each person's humanity since "He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation."[31] What matters is that one lives one's life from the inside, whether this leads to unparalleled triumph or catastrophe. In fact, in *On Liberty* Mill writes repeatedly about the danger of allowing the prejudicial monster of public opinion to act oppressively against the autonomous desires and decisions of individual members of society,

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critically upon basic commitments and values, whether inherited or independently chosen, and to pursue life projects in a context that provides an ample range of choice-worthy options, with genuine opportunities to revise one's commitments should the individual no longer deem them worthy of endorsement. I follow Rob Reich in viewing autonomy as applying to a person's whole life and character, not a specific action or set of actions, and as being a matter of degree, not an on-off condition. Individuals can vary in the degree to which they are autonomous and a particular individual may be more or less autonomous at different points over the course of her own life. In this way, autonomy is not merely a capacity but develops into a trait of character. See Rob Reich, *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 93.

[28] Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*, Gertrude Himmelfarb, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 68-69.

[29] Richard Arneson is right to point out that Mill does carve out one key exception to his general view that the state is unjustified in "interfering with the liberty" of its citizens, save when there is a credible risk of harm to others: voluntary enslavement. See Arneson, Richard J. "Mill versus Paternalism," *Ethics*, Volume 90 (1980), 470-489.

[30] Mill, 122.

even when public opinion may have the best interests of such persons at heart and even in cases in which such individuals choose wrongly. Millian liberal individualism stresses the belief that it is better and more valuable to have chosen the contours of one's life for oneself even if one might have experienced greater successes or a deeper knowledge of "the good" if subject to the will of another. It prefers autonomous failure to heteronomous contentment. It is good for people ultimately to be engaged in forming and pursuing projects which distinguish their own lives because it permits them to impart meaning to their lives and, as another author notes, "giving meaning to one's life is essential to having a character."[32] In this sense, the intrinsic value of autonomy is paramount.

Despite Mill's strong admonitions to protect self-regarding behavior at nearly all costs ("whatever crushes individuality is despotism"),[33] he does concede that there must be limits to individual liberty precisely to protect the individual liberty of others. This other-regarding maxim comes into play "Whenever...there is a definite damage, or a definite risk of damage, either to an individual or to the public," in which case the matter "is taken out of the province of liberty and placed in that of morality or law."[34] Actions, unlike opinions, that are "prejudicial to the interests of others"[35] have no justification under the harm principle and can be dealt with by social or legal condemnation without any violation of the first maxim.

Anti-traditionalists, many of whom reject nearly all efforts by the state to eradicate "victimless immorality," that is, actions or behaviors whose alleged immorality causes harm solely to the individual directly engaged in the immoral activity, have a philosophical friend in Mill. Relying on Mill's liberal framework, they can make a strong case in favor of a school-sponsored sex education program in liberal democracies that honors the following two maxims:

1. Self-regarding: Each individual ought to exercise her own autonomy in sexual matters.

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[31] Mill, 123.
[32] Wall, S. *Liberalism, Perfectionism and Restraint* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 147.
[33] Mill, 128.
[34] Mill, 149.
[35] Mill, 163.

2. Other-regarding: Each individual ought to demonstrate respect for the sexual autonomy of others.

It is not difficult to imagine the manner in which the "Big Four" topics (masturbation, sexual orientation, contraception, and abortion),[36] as well as the growing debate over abstinence-only sex education, would be dealt with in a sex education program modeled on these two principles. Masturbation would be treated as a harmless vehicle for sexual release, one that is psychologically and physically healthy, and one that may be a good alternative to engaging in sexual activity with other people before one is able to handle the possible emotional, financial, and psychological consequences of such activity. Exploring one's body, presumably, would be taught as in no way significantly different than exploring one's mind.

Sexual orientation, whether conceived of as a result of nurture or nature, would be strongly linked to the expression of one's equal liberty and right to privacy. While the teacher might encourage students of all sexual persuasions (gay & lesbian, bisexual, or straight) to be faithful in their relationships and treat their partners as ends rather than means, it would be unlikely that they would offer any condemnation or moral assessment of homosexuality. New York City's Rainbow Curriculum[37] provides one illustration of anti-traditionalist efforts to have schools, beginning in the elementary years, present homosexuality to students as a normal, healthy lifestyle.

In line with this emphasis on individual autonomy, anti-traditionalists strongly oppose the abstinence-only sex education model and, instead, argue that the time has come to accept the reality that many teens are sexually active and need practical information and advice, not a lesson on the merits of chastity. Rather than abstinence-only, anti-traditionalists advocate a comprehensive sex education design, one that includes attention to a wide variety of issues,

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[36] Zimmerman, 206.

[37] Perhaps the most publicized effort to incorporate homosexuality into mainstream educational curricula, the short-lived Rainbow Curriculum was introduced into New York City elementary schools in 1993 and included such books, now infamous, as *Heather has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate*. After an internal rebellion by the Borough of Queens school board and a great deal of negative attention, School Chancellor Joseph Hernandez was fired and the program scrapped.

including biology, contraception, and reproductive rights; STD and HIV transmission; self-esteem; emotional and physical health; and students' ability to assess and critique societal understandings of family, gender roles, and so forth. Citing statistics that show that by the time teens are seniors in high school, 65% of them have had sex and nearly 40% have already engaged in intercourse by their freshman year,[38] along with additional evidence demonstrating that adolescents experiment with a range of non-coital sexual activities prior to engaging in intercourse itself,[39] anti-traditionalists contend that sex education that either exclusively focuses on abstinence or provides simply the "bare-bones" of information fails to meet the needs of many, if not all, of the students subjected to it. The most fervent anti-traditionalists seek to go beyond the comprehensive model and argue that schools should be involved in the actual distribution of condoms and/or have on-site health clinics to provide students with assistance in everything from obtaining birth control to arranging for an abortion.

The anti-traditionalists, with Mill at their side,[40] make a compelling case for the provision of school-sponsored comprehensive sex education to young citizens. If we care about sexual liberty, equal rights, and personal dignity, the autonomy-promoting Millian model should give us

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[38] Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. "Teen Sexual Activity Fact Sheet," August 2000, 1.

[39] Recall, for example, the much publicized story about a group of female middle-school students in Georgia who, when being checked for meningitis in their throats, were found to have contracted pharyngeal gonorrhea from performing fellatio on boys in their school. Had there not been the concern over meningitis, no one would have considered the possibility that such young students could be at risk for an STD. See Remez, L. "Special Report: Oral Sex Among Adolescents: Is it Sex or is it Abstinence?" *Family Planning Perspectives*, Volume 32, Number 6, December 2000, 299.

[40] Certainly, despite Mill's robust arguments in favor of liberal autonomy, Mill himself would not be likely to support the widespread implementation of the anti-traditionalist, or any other, model of sex education in schools. Mill argues for the maximization of educational diversity, going as far as to suggest that parents provide education for their children in any shape or form they choose, provided children are able to pass annual government-sponsored examinations to track educational competency. This advocacy of deep educational diversity, and his rejection of any standardization, is integrally related to Mill's desire to foster eclectic genius in the name of progress. Consequently, while the anti-traditionalist position is Millian (inspired by his arguments in favor of individual liberty and self-determination), it is not Mill's. That said, Mill does insist that students should be educated in such a way that they "possess the knowledge requisite to make [their] conclusions on any given subject worth attending to" (178). This suggests that Mill would support, and indeed would find it necessary, that children be aware of , and able to engage with, a spectrum of views and arguments on any given educational subject, rather than blindly follow one particular position. Hence, his comment that "A student of philosophy would be the better for being able to stand an examination both in Locke and in Kant, whichever of the two he takes up with, or even if with neither: and

pause. However, despite its attractiveness, there are serious flaws with the model as it currently stands. One particularly significant objection is that children, along with many adolescents and teenagers, *are not autonomous*, hence making the anti-traditionalist approach naïve at best, disastrous at worst. Treating school-aged citizens as if they are autonomous places upon them the burden of sexual decision-making when they may not possess the know-how and maturity to decide well. This argument merits considerable attention because, if it is correct, it will have a major impact on the substantive and structural design of sex education programs in liberal democracies. Let us delve deeper into this objection to determine its merits.

Autonomous Children: A Contradiction In Terms?

Barbara DaFoe Whitehead, in her provocative article "The Failure of Sex Education," provides an articulate account of this objection. Describing what she calls the technocratic approach of comprehensive sex education (advocated by anti-traditionalists) she writes, "It assumes that once teenagers acquire a formal body of sex knowledge and skills, along with the proper contraceptive technology, they will be able to govern their own sexual behavior responsibly. In brief, what comprehensive sex education envisions is a regime of teenage sexual self-rule."[41] DaFoe's argument is not the more typical, and perhaps weaker, traditionalist argument that ignorance protects. What she rejects is the anti-traditionalist argument that *knowledge* protects, that knowing the facts leads to prudent and deliberative sexual decision-making.

Specifically, she takes issue with anti-traditionalist educators and sex education curriculum designers who place their faith "in the power of knowledge to change behavior."[42] According to DaFoe, this faith roots out of four tenets of current anti-traditionalist sex education ideology: 1) people are sexual from birth, 2) children are sexually miseducated, 3) sex education

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there is no reasonable objection to examining an atheist in the evidences of Christianity, provided he is not required to profess a belief in them" (178). See Mill, *On Liberty*, 176-9.

[41] DaFoe Whitehead, B. "The Failure of Sex Education," *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 1994, 67.

[42] DaFoe, 68.

is necessary to rectify this miseducation, and 4) sex education should start early and utilize the "building blocks" approach.[43] Taken together, these tenets send a clear message: children are always and already sexual and if only they had the facts, they would be able to navigate their sexuality and make informed (and presumably good) decisions based on accurate information. In short, *information equals autonomy*.

DaFoe is not alone in her skepticism over the information-autonomy connection. Take for example the concerns expressed by one traditionalist who describes a conspiracy of sorts among

> psychologists, psychiatrists, educators, child advocates, lawmakers, advertisers, marketers, and storytellers…[who have intentionally] helped advance the idea of children as capable, rational, and autonomous, as beings endowed with all the qualities necessary for their entrance into the adult world – qualities such as talents, interests, values, conscience, and a conscious sense of themselves. In this view, children need little shaping by adults; they are essentially 'finished,' and childhood has lost its traditional purpose as a time set aside for shaping raw human material into a culturally competent adult.[44]

If children and teenagers are already autonomous and simply need that autonomy to be pointed in a positive direction through learning about the facts of the birds and the bees, parents and educators have little need to worry. Defensible sex education simply makes sure that, starting at a young age, children are provided with accurate details about sexual activity and its consequences. Then, being both biologically ready and intellectually informed, they decide for themselves.

What if, however, facts are not enough? DaFoe cites a number of credible sources that indicate, for example, that a "knowledgeable thirteen-year-old is no more likely to use contraceptives than is an uninformed thirteen-year-old."[45] Educators and parents may let themselves off too easy, and demonstrate a good deal of irresponsibility, if they assume too readily that the transmission of facts to students is sufficient to promote wise sexual decision-making. While the facilitation of autonomy among learners is an admirable goal of liberal education, it may be premature to assume that by the age of thirteen or even sixteen that students

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[43] DaFoe, 59-60.
[44] Hymowitz, 4.

have actually come to *be* autonomous. Autonomy requires more than merely a memorization of facts. We need to consider the implications of emotional and psychological development on autonomous behavior.

As an illustration, one need only look at what teenage girls themselves say about sex to discern that the "just the facts, ma'am" approach misses something terribly crucial about the experience of being a teenage girl in today's society. When 1,200 female adolescents were asked what topics they would like to see covered in sex education, 84% wanted to know more about "How to say no without hurting the other person's feelings."[46] Other research shows that one-fourth of female teenagers describe their first experience of sexual intercourse as "voluntary but unwanted."[47] As one sex educator notes, "If you're in the back seat of a car with a boy, and he says, 'If you don't have sex with me, I'm not going to see you anymore,' you are not thinking about fallopian tubes or ovaries, you're thinking about that relationship."[48] Knowing how to use contraceptives or about the risk of disease from sexual intercourse has little impact on the decision-making of girls who crave popularity, acceptance, and love – and who believe that "giving in" to sex will get them these things. They may opt for "safer" sex (although many will not), but they will continue to engage in sexual activity with boys, despite the fact that they consider it unwanted or ill-timed.

Knowledge is empowering. Yet, by itself it cannot achieve the goal of females controlling their own sexuality. Fuller control requires something more subtle, but also more elusive – girls must be helped to begin to think of themselves as people who have rights and who may assert those rights, who have goals and who can achieve those goals, who have needs and may seek to meet those needs, who have worth and are entitled to have that worth acknowledged

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[45] Planned Parenthood quoted in DaFoe, 68.
[46] Glazer, S. "Preventing Teen Pregnancy: is Better Sex Education the Answer?" *CQ Researcher*, Volume 3 (1993), 422.
[47] Kaiser, "Teen Sexual Activity," 1.
[48] Marian Howard, quoted in Glazer, "Preventing Teen Pregnancy: is Better Sex Education the Answer?" *CQ Researcher*, Volume 3 (1993), 422.

and respected by those around them. Knowledge does not equal autonomy. This formula fails to address the magnitude of the problem. Teenage girls need to experience the supercession of servility. Servility is in essence "a gross failure to understand or appreciate one's equal standing in the moral community as a right-holder on a par with others."[49] Autonomous sexual decision-making requires not only the transmission of accurate facts about the world, sexuality, and the consequences of sexual activity, but *a belief in one's own moral equality and worth.*

Some anti-traditionalist writers on the subject, especially critical theorists, have, to their credit, acknowledged this need. However, they tend to cast it in terms of "self-empowerment" *now* rather than autonomous decision-making *later*, when females have developed the psychological and emotional maturity, in conjunction with an awareness of facts and access to opportunities, to make good decisions. Michelle Fine, for example, who has written about the absence of a discourse of female desire in school sex education, explains that

> A genuine discourse of desire would invite adolescents to explore what feels good and bad, desirable and undesirable, grounded in experiences, needs, and limits. Such a discourse would release females from a position of receptivity, enable an analysis of the dialectics of victimization and pleasure, and would pose female adolescents as subjects of sexuality, initiators as well as negotiators.[50]

Later she adds that adolescent girls ought to focus "their energies in ways that are sexually autonomous, responsible, and pleasurable."[51] While I remain sympathetic to her aspiration to build confidence and self-respect in female students, arguing that adolescents ought to experiment sexually to see what feels good and autonomously direct their own sexuality strikes at the heart of DaFoe's (and many traditionalists') legitimate concerns with the anti-traditionalist approach. Coupling "autonomy" with "adolescence," especially in the realm of sexuality, is a

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[49] Callan, Eamonn. *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 152. Callan, it is worth noting, considers the overcoming of servility a more reasonable goal than autonomy promotion, what he labels "a more persuasive cousin of the autonomy argument." This is because Callan defines autonomy in maximal terms – if one fails to reach the apogee of Socratic self-examination one is not autonomous. Because my own understanding of autonomy is far less robust and more akin to Reich's minimal notion of autonomy, I consider Callan's servility argument rather similar to my view of autonomy.

[50] Fine, Michelle. "Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire," in Lois Weis and Michelle Fine, ed, *Beyond Silenced Voices* (New York: SUNY Press, 1993), 79.

suspect combination – one that places an enormous burden on young citizens who are unlikely to be able to handle all of the ramifications (emotional, physical, psychological, and financial) that come with it.

It is not only teenage girls whose emotional and psychological development needs seriously to be considered when thinking about sexual autonomy. Take, for example, a study of fifteen- and sixteen-year-old boys in Australia, in which one researcher found that boys' perceptions of masculinity were based primarily on what men were not, that is, women. Boys tended to jockey for status positions in the classroom, with the achievement of higher status linked to which boy could display the most contempt for women and anything deemed feminine. Disdain for women was openly displayed through the use of particular words used to reference them (e.g. slut, whore, tart, chick) and also by the teasing of individual boys who were thought to be too effeminate – a sign of weakness, passivity, and vulnerability.[52] The exploratory research of Lynda Measor, involving thirteen- to fifteen-year-olds from southeast England, supports these findings. Measor paints a troubling and sad picture of young men who must "repress and stamp on the qualities and aspects of themselves" deemed too feminine to maintain.[53] Acting out the part of the sexual predator, one with few emotions or responsibilities, becomes a sort of mission of adolescent boys who seek to signal to others, especially their peers, that they are normal, masculine young men. It is hardly persuasive to argue that teaching these boys about STD transmission rates, contraception, and reproduction, by itself, would have a demonstrable and positive impact on the quality and reasonableness of their sexual decision-making.

Significantly, Mill himself excludes children up until the age of "manhood or womanhood"[54] from his autonomy-promoting maxims and warns that they must be safeguarded from their own actions as well as the actions of others. While Mill valorizes choice and self-rule,

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[51] Fine, 83.
[52] Szirom, 17-20.
[53] Measor, 63.
[54] Mill, 69.

he is mindful that autonomy requires the exercise of particular faculties ("perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and moral preference") and argues "it is the privilege and proper condition of a human being, arrived at the maturity of his faculties, to use and interpret experience in his own way."[55] Autonomy, in short, is not the purview of the young. It requires some degree of self-understanding, experience, competency, and empathy that most children and adolescents would be hard-pressed to demonstrate. Inculcating the competencies needed for personal autonomy and a respect for the autonomy of others in the learner are necessary goals of sex education precisely because students themselves cannot be said, except in rare circumstances, to *be* autonomous – sexually or otherwise.[56]

Indeed, one of the most troubling aspects of the anti-traditionalist/technocratic approach is its characterization of human beings as sexual from birth, leading some of its most vocal advocates to claim that "You are being sexual when you throw your arms around your grandpa and give him a hug."[57] Such extreme claims seem to assume a fair degree of sexual autonomy among even our youngest citizens and throw into doubt paternalistic legislation aimed toward the protection of children. Treating our children as always sexual becomes problematic, even dangerous, when it sends the message to them and adult others that sexual autonomy requires nothing more than *being* sexual (or having the capacity to be sexual) and having a few relevant facts about the matter.

We have enforceable strictures against certain sexual activities involving children precisely because we do not consider them to be autonomous. Our legal norms regarding the age of sexual consent reject the technocratic view. Adults are regularly prosecuted for statutory rape for engaging in sex with minors (age sixteen in most states). Informed consent, most of us

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[55] Mill, 122.

[56] It is beyond the scope of this work to consider what ramifications this may or may not have for the treatment of minors as adults under criminal laws. I suspect that because cases are reviewed individually, there is no conflict in assuming that most children and teens are non- or –semi-autonomous while holding individual perpetrators responsible for their actions if shown to be sufficiently autonomous.

[57] Susan Wilson, President of the New Jersey Network for Family Life Education, quoted in DaFoe, 57.

believe, requires more than a child merely saying "Yes". It makes little sense to assume that these same adolescents and teenagers are sexually autonomous and able to make prudent sexual decisions.[58] The autonomy that anti-traditionalists advocate requires psychological and emotional preparedness, even on their own terms.

Incorporating this objection into the anti-traditionalist account of justifiable sex education in liberal society, the soundest conception of anti-traditional sex education would be based on the following principles:

1. Self-regarding: Each individual, once sufficiently immersed in the conditions favorable to autonomy and assisted in acquiring the information, evaluative skills, and character traits conducive to autonomy, ought to exercise his or her own autonomy in sexual matters.
2. Other-regarding: Each individual, regardless of his or her own personal degree of autonomy, ought to demonstrate respect for the sexual autonomy of others.

Natural Law, Sexuality, and Moral Integrity

Traditionalists, as I have inferred, are likely to have great difficulty accepting the anti-traditionalist justification for and design of sex education. In fact, the anti-traditionalist emphasis on respecting diverse citizens' sexual autonomy and, more subtly, their Millian distrust of enabling educators or "public opinion" to control the sexual morality of young citizens seems far adrift from the impetus behind most support for school sex education today, namely, society's increasing distress over social ills like unwanted pregnancy and the transmission of diseases (some deadly) among today's youth. Many traditionalists, echoing the objection discussed earlier, worry that it is this very emphasis on autonomy that jeopardizes the sexual integrity of young people, hence the following comment, made by Phyllis Schlafly, on the central difficulty with anti-traditionalist sex education: "It is selective propaganda which artificially encourages

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[58] This line of argument may have ramifications for the debate over parental notification in cases of teenagers seeking abortions. Generally, I suspect that if teenagers are not autonomous, financially stable, or emotionally mature, it makes little sense to give parents the right to "force" their children to follow through with having a child they will be wholly unprepared to raise (although the option of adoption certainly muddies this somewhat). A forced abortion seems equally troubling. The abortion controversy is one of extreme sensitivity, involving not only a serious debate about what constitutes a human life and how such life justifiably may be treated, but also ever evolving knowledge in the medical and scientific

children to participate in adult sex, while it censors out the facts of life about the unhappy consequences. It is robbing children of their childhood."[59]

Traditionalists are circumspect of formalized sex education, fearing it will be more harmful than helpful and encourage the very kinds of sexual behaviors that traditionalists want sex educators to discourage. In this vein, some argue that sex education actually predisposes teens to engage in immoral activities or to enter into sexual activity at a younger age than they otherwise would have. Moreover, they fear that this sexual experimentation will occur in a context that teaches children that sex need not be part of a permanent heterosexual love relationship but can be casual, short-term, and exclusively concerned with physical gratification. One traditionalist explains, "They [anti-traditionalists] begin with the premise that teenagers should not have babies. We begin with the premise that single teenagers should not have sex."[60]

Pervading, and at times dominating, the traditionalist position is the concern that sex education, and sometimes education in general, will create doubt in children's minds about the religious convictions of their families and communities. Some traditionalists charge schools with pushing "an aggressive atheism which denies God, denies life after death, and shuns all moral absolutes."[61] They worry that when an authority figure such as a teacher suggests to a child that the values one's parents endorse may not be worthy of such endorsement, or that there are other values possibly worthy of one's loyalty, the family's interest in raising their children to adhere to their own religious beliefs is undermined. Knowing there are credible and valuable alternatives (alternatives children may be asked to learn about, critically consider, and evaluate), children will no longer be able to take seriously the religion of their parents or will have to overcome an inordinate amount of doubt in order to do so. In this view, the unimpeded passing down of religious views is considered a right of the parents, and the more liberal position that the child's

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communities about fetal growth and awareness. As such, I simply note that some of the arguments I present may be applicable to aspects of that debate as well.

[59] Phyllis Schlafly (1981), as quoted in McKay, 63.

[60] Cannaught Marshner, quoted in McKay, 64-5.

own freedom of belief and development of personal autonomy may require exposure to alternative viewpoints (making religious conviction a choice, rather than a pursuit) is given little, if any, weight.[62]

Insofar as traditionalists base their arguments for what sex education should and should not be solely on sectarian religious convictions or mere prejudice, they fail to make a convincing case for imposing their interpretation of appropriate school-sponsored sex education on, not only their own children, but the wider population of child citizens in general. But all is not lost for the traditionalist case, which has a close ally in natural law theory - a secular line of thought that, while it is strongly sympathetic to traditionalist concerns (for example, concerning sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, and moral deviance), employs modes of argumentation based on rationality and reason, not theistic imperatives. Moreover, although natural law theorists have glaring ethical disagreements with anti-traditionalists about the proper direction of society and sexual morality, their robust support for the promotion of autonomy and equality offers good reason to be cautiously optimistic about the prospect of building a bridge to overcome what many have considered an insurmountable ideological impasse. Here I will focus on the arguments put forth by natural law theorist Robert P. George, whose work is particularly forthright on the subject of sexual morality.

Natural law theory begins with the basic presumption that there are concrete moral truths about what constitutes a good life and a bad one, and that these truths are knowable with the aid of human reason. Consequently, from the outset, George takes issue with Mill's contention that society has no place imposing public morality on diverse citizens whose individual right to liberty guarantees them absolute freedom to make moral choices (virtuous or sinful, correct or

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[61] Zimmerman, 209.

[62] Of course, much that's already in public education in terms of coursework and pedagogy compromises the unadulterated passing down of religious beliefs to children (take for example, the complaints of the parents in *Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education*, 827 F.2d 1058, 6th Cir. 1987). In fact, growing numbers of parents who see public education in general as antithetical to their religious interests have either arranged for their children to attend private institutions, or increasingly, to be homeschooled.

erroneous) so long as they do not cause undue harm to other members of society. He argues, in contrast to Mill, that there is no such thing as a moral right to do wrong and that political communities are often "justified in limiting liberty for the sake of upholding public morality."[63] However, George does insist that acts must not be merely morally *controversial*, but morally *wrong*, if they are to be the subject of prohibitive legislation. In fact, he virulently opposes any utilitarian perspective that seeks to gain the greatest good for the greatest number by enforcing widely held public morals, without any concern for whether such beliefs are in fact true. "[M]ajorities," he asserts, "have no right to enact their mere prejudices into law."[64]

George's willingness to endorse such limitations puts him at odds with some traditionalists and seems to align him rather closely with those who subscribe to anti-traditionalist ideology. Take, for example, the dissenting opinion written by Justice Scalia in response to the Supreme Court's recent decision to overturn a Texas law that prohibited private, consensual sexual acts between partners of the same sex.[65] Scalia writes, "Many Americans do not want persons who openly engage in homosexual conduct as partners in their business, as scoutmasters for their children, as teachers in their children's schools, or as boarders in their home. They view this as protecting themselves and their families from a lifestyle that they believe to be immoral and destructive." He argues, in a nutshell, that if the majority of the citizenry have a moral disagreement with homosexuality and seek to have the laws reflect this moral condemnation, such legislation is not discriminatory but is the natural consequence of how democracy works. George, despite his shared belief that homosexuality is both deviant and immoral, would be likely reject Scalia's reasoning because public laws based on public prejudice result in the unjustifiable denial of individual liberty. In his view, it is a necessary, though insufficient, condition that an act must be genuinely immoral if it is to be the legitimate subject of a morals law. That, of

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[63] George, Robert P. *Making Men Moral: Civil Liberties and Public Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), vii.
[64] George (1995), x.
[65] *Lawrence et al. v. Texas*, No. 02-102 (2003).

course, begs the question of how one knows when something is a moral truth, rather than a mere prejudice.

Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, George does not argue that it is through religious revelation, Biblical interpretation, or the authority of spiritual leaders that we can come to discover moral truth (although he does say that faith may help us attain the fullest understanding of morality). Instead, his worldview rests firmly on the premise that basic moral truths are accessible to human reason. Rationality and practical reasoning are not secular devices to be feared, but rather the primary vehicles to moral knowledge. In this vein, he argues that if someone, presumably an elected official, "has good reasons to believe that a certain act is immoral [he] may support the legal prohibition of that act for the sake of protecting public morals without necessarily violating a norm of justice or political morality."[66] There is a risk, George acknowledges, of the legislator proscribing particular activities that are not morally wicked because of an error in judgment. He even goes so far as to say that "he may fall victim to his own peculiar prejudices or to prejudices widely shared in his culture."[67] Notwithstanding this, in taking on his legislative position he has made a promise to reason through controversial questions of morality. Though he might fail to live up to his promise, the promise itself remains the same: "that he let no prejudice, or partiality, or other *nonrational* factor, whether his own or others', affect his decision to limit liberty for the sake of public morals" (emphasis mine).[68] George is careful to acknowledge that there are a multiplicity of basic forms of the good, leading to a range of genuine moral pluralism; the legislator must be sensitive to and committed to respecting this basic fact. He makes it clear, though, that this is a range with real limits. It is not relativism.

This range of legitimate moral diversity (which includes mutually incompatible life commitments and plans) is the natural outcome, argues George, of the continual expression of individual autonomy.

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[66] George (1995), viii.
[67] George (1995), 78.

> [P]eople are fulfilled in part by deliberating and choosing for themselves a pattern of their own. Practical reasoning is not merely a human capacity; it is itself a fundamental aspect of human well-being and fulfillment: a basic dimension of the human good consists precisely in bringing reason to bear in deliberating and choosing among competing valuable possibilities, commitments, and ways of life.[69]

It is here, in his robust recognition of the important, even central role, autonomy plays in many people's lives that George seems to move the closest toward locating common ground with the anti-traditionalists. However, subscribing to the view that liberty ought not to be construed as license, George asserts that respect for the value of autonomy does not preclude constraints from being placed on the expression of individual liberty and free choice. Rather, the state legitimately may place limitations on individual autonomy since

> [w]hile it seems sound enough to claim that the human goods of personal integrity and self-constitution depend upon the availability of significant opportunities for practical deliberation, judgment, and choice, it is not at all clear that these goods depend upon the availability of particular immoral choices that are insulated from interference by the government or others because they concern matters that are important to people.[70]

There are three grounds on which morals laws can be justified according to George.[71]

1. A paternalistic concern for the moral integrity of individuals
2. A "quasi-paternalistic" concern for the moral integrity of people whose individual choices will be influenced by "the moral quality of the social milieu that morals laws may help to maintain"
3. A "concern for social integration around true principles of morality"

How, one might reasonably ask, can George commit himself to such a robust conception of autonomy, one that views it as a basic dimension of the good, while at the same time opening the door to paternalistic state interference in individual choice-making? The key is in understanding two aspects of George's thought: first, his view of the proper roles of emotion and reason in autonomous moral choice-making and, second, his conception of what demonstrating equal concern toward citizens entails.

A. *The Quest for Autonomy: The Victory of Reason over Desire*

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[68] George (1995), 78.
[69] George (1995), 39.
[70] George (1995), 124.
[71] George (1995), 60. It is worth noting that morals laws are already woven into the fabric of liberal society. Laws which prohibit gambling and prostitution are just two examples of the many behaviors and activities the government is given the authority to limit or outlaw because of concerns over morality.

While George agrees with those who insist that laws cannot make men moral, he argues that it is too simplistic to say that morals laws can *only* produce outward conformity to moral imperatives. Prohibiting certain activities or behaviors may help "settle people down" so that they are able to "gain some appreciation of the good, some grasp of the intrinsic value of morally upright choosing, some control by their reason of their passions."[72] His hope is particularly Aristotelian; once an individual has, with the educative assistance of the law, gathered some control over his emotions and become habituated to doing right, even if he did not start out believing it was right, over time he will internalize this morality-driven self-control and act reasonably from his own volition. In essence, the legislating of morality can help people "*make themselves* moral" for the right reasons, which is *the* most valuable expression of autonomy.[73] In this way, "even the average person may then learn to appreciate the good a little, and, in choosing for the sake of the good, become morally better."[74] Genuine moral action may emerge from what begins as legal conformity.

But morals laws, argues George, can do more than directly affect individual autonomy and virtue. They can better the "moral ecology" of society, that is, the moral framework of society that influences the kinds of choices individual citizens make and also reflects the morality or immorality of those choices in turn. A sound moral ecology creates a social environment that is inhospitable to morally depraved or insidious activities and behaviors. The justification for using morals laws to help sustain a sound moral ecology is fundamentally *individualistic*; rejecting utilitarian arguments, George explains that individual autonomous choice-making will be both more rationally-grounded and morally upright to the extent that society has a sound and reasonable moral ecology that supports people's efforts to be virtuous rather than inducing them to engage in unworthy activities. This concern with moral ecology, precisely because it is related to the harm that a weak moral ecology will inflict on diverse individuals, can be defended even on

[72] George (1995), 26.
[73] George (1995), 1.

Mill's own terms. If permitting individuals to engage in immoral choice-making lowers the quality of the social milieu such that other individuals are harmed because there are more inducements for them to choose wrongly, on one interpretation of Mill's other-regarding component of the harm principle, this constitutes an action by one individual that unjustifiably imposes undue harm on another.

Many liberals (setting aside for the moment liberal perfectionists like Raz and Wall), and certainly anti-traditionalists, will have a fundamental complaint with George's heavily paternalistic use of the law as a conduit to a morally upright citizenry, despite George's contention that using the law in this manner will help individuals become increasingly more reasonable which, in turn, supports their interest in autonomy. Similarly, they will likely object to George's clear and unapologetic rejection of the distinction between what is public and what is private, since in his view the allegedly immoral private actions of diverse individuals are liable to lower the quality of the moral ecology of the social community, undermining other individuals' opportunity to pursue morally worthy projects and abandon morally unworthy commitments. There are no victimless immoralities. Autonomy is a good, but only fully good when used reasonably in the pursuit of virtue, rather than vice. Perhaps a consideration of George's understanding of equality will help elucidate what grounds his attempt to promote autonomy and equality, without rejecting moral paternalism.

B. *The Distinction Between the Equal Dignity of Persons and their Actions*

A belief in the intrinsic worth and dignity of all persons is shared by Millian anti-traditionalists and natural law traditionalists alike. George contends that the legislation of morals and the maintenance of a sound moral ecology, rather than being expressions of contempt toward citizens, are actually a recognition of their equal moral worth. If we assume with George that all people have an interest in living morally upright lives, then the legislation of morality is a

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[74] George (1995), 26.

justified expression of equal concern since each person's interests are being taken seriously by the state. George defends his position in the following way:

> To treat *persons* with equal respect...is to act from an *appreciation* of their equal value *as persons*, as unique loci of human goods, possessing the rational capacity for self-determination by free choice, but subject to being deflected from full reasonableness in choosing not only by mistakes in judgment, but also by habits, weakness of will, and unintegrated feelings, desires, and other emotional factors. Governments are obliged to show equal respect to persons *qua persons*, not to all of the persons' acts and choices.[75]

This holds even if particular individuals resist the morality the state attempts to enforce as an expression of equal respect, since people often fail to value things that are in fact valuable for them. What is most notable, for our purposes, in this line of argument is the robust and unwavering emphasis George places on each individual's moral integrity, ability to reason well, and equal worth.

The manner in which George uses natural law theory to address the issues of sex outside of marriage and homosexuality provides an outstanding and highly relevant illustration of this point, especially since abstinence-only education and sexual orientation are two of the most highly charged and controversial aspects of the sex education debate, with traditionalists and anti-traditionalists viewing their treatment as a litmus test for the quality and desirability of sex education programs in general.[76] George, like most traditionalists, condemns sex outside of marriage and homosexual conduct as immoral. However, unlike many traditionalists who argue that non-marital sex and homosexuality are abominations against God, and who sometimes describe gays and lesbians, for example, as lacking in human dignity, there is no hint of bigotry in George's arguments. Instead, he bases his arguments on his understanding of reason, science, and the equal value of all human beings.

George, like most natural law theorists, conceives of marriage as "a bodily, emotional, and spiritual union of one man and one woman, ordered to the generating, nurturing, and educating of children, marked by exclusivity and permanence, and consummated and actualized

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[75] George (1995), 102.
[76] George (1995), 153.

by acts that are reproductive in type, even if not, in every case, in fact."[77] Marital sex is sex whose justification is the "one-flesh union"[78] of an organically (that is, biologically) mated pair.[79] Although such sexual activities may also result in pregnancy, pleasure, or intimacy, the intrinsic worth of marital sex is the union itself. George, who believes in a deep mind-body connection, worries that when sex is engaged in solely as a means to something (e.g., emotional intimacy, physical gratification, power) the body is treated as an instrument and this instrumental use of the person degrades and disintegrates that person. George's belief in the value of non-instrumental sex also explains his condemnation of anal and oral sex (whether engaged in by heterosexuals or homosexuals), as well as masturbation, none of which are reproductive in type, and all of which are considered self-alienating.

The argument against homosexuality flows naturally from this view. If sexual biology is infused with moral meaning so that non-marital[80] sex is inherently degrading, homosexual sexual activity is inherently immoral and ought not to be encouraged. George treads very carefully here. He opposes any expression of malice or violence against homosexuals, who he believes should be treated with equal dignity and concern. Further, he concedes that sexual orientation may in fact be natural, that is, unchosen, but argues that there is a critical distinction to be made between reasons to act (which are morally relevant) and natural desires (which are only relevant inasmuch as they are supported by reasons to desire such things, regardless of the force or power of desires). In other words, having homosexual desires or inclinations may not be a choice but engaging in homosexual sexual acts is.

What are the repercussions of natural law-based traditionalist ideology for sex education design and content? George never addresses the issue of sex education directly so it is necessary

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[77] George, Robert P. *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion, and Morality in Crisis* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2001), 5.
[78] George (2001), 82.
[79] This union has intrinsic value, even if no children are produced from marital sex. Infertile couples, for example, can still engaged in non-disintegrative marital sex despite their inability to procreate.

to abstract from his arguments about the legitimacy of enforcing sexual morality, his views of what constitutes sexually immoral and degrading behavior, and his advocacy of a sound moral ecology, coupled with his strong support for reason-based autonomy and the fundamental equality of all persons. Taken at face value, one would assume that George would support the legal prohibition of sexually immoral behaviors such as sodomy, sex outside of marriage, as well as the institution of gay marriage. Sex education, in line with these prohibitions, would describe homosexuality and non-marital sex as inherently self-alienating and morally depraved. If students wish to treat each other as equals, rather than mere tools, they will refrain from engaging in such behaviors and live chastely, no matter how strong their independent desires may be.

However, despite George's vigorous justification of morals laws and his belief that his views about sexual immorality are morally true, that is, based on sound moral reasons, in the end, he is content to leave most matters of morality to individual human judgment. Not only does he argue that a legislator may, after weighing other compelling considerations such as financial strain, difficulty of fair enforcement, the diversion of police and resources away from more serious crimes, and "the invariably complex circumstances of particular political communities at particular times"[81] choose to tolerate wrongdoing in society, but he adds that "[w]here an attempt to enforce a moral duty would be self-defeating, one has a *conclusive* reason not to make the attempt."[82] Moreover, he cites the danger of having people habituated to relating to a central authority rather than focusing on horizontal relationships, the risk of exploitation of morals laws by disciplinarian or Machiavellian characters who fail to acknowledge moral diversity, and the risk of an abusive government as considerations that may favor the allowance of certain moral vices in society.[83]

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[80] Here, I am employing George's use of the term marital to indicate not only sex between married people but also sex that is reproductive in type and has as its justifying purpose the one-flesh union of husband and wife.
[81] George (1995), vii.
[82] George (1995), 125 footnote 21.
[83] George (1995), 42.

Taking seriously the futility of attempting to enforce some forms of morality, the cost and difficulty of doing so, and the diversity of human goods (including mutually incompatible moral commitments), even George admits that only a very small number of immoral activities would be subject to legal prohibitions. While it is clear from George's work that abortion, for example, should be both discouraged and disallowed,[84] the fate of homosexual private sexual behavior remains unclear. However, there is much in George's argument to suggest that legal punishment may not be an effective or appropriate means to promoting some forms of sexual morality. Moreover, while George would likely support the inclusion of clear ethical directives as they pertain to adolescent sexual behavior, his strong commitment to autonomous reasoning and reflection would rule out attempting to achieve the outcome of teenage conformity to sexual morality by way of fear-based sex education or blind submission to an external authority (e.g. a teacher, church leader, or religious organization). After all, along with the vices of sexual immorality, George hopes that society will become inhospitable to "the vices of moral infantilism, conformism, servility, mindless obedience to authority, and hypocrisy."[85]

The most attractive conception of traditionalist sex education would be based on the following principles derived from natural law theory:

1. Sexuality is an area of central importance to human life, and in particular, the marital union. Non-marital sexual activity is to be discouraged because it harms the individuals engaged in it by treating them as instruments and disintegrating their selfhood.
2. The promotion of rationality, reason, and autonomy assists diverse individuals in making good sexual choices, demonstrating a sense of equal self-worth, and in raising the quality of the moral ecology of society, which in turn supports other people's efforts to make choices that are both moral and self-respecting, rather than wicked and degrading.
3. Paternalism in the realm of sexuality is justified to the extent that it assists with Principles 1 & 2, is based on sound moral reasoning (rather than revelation or faith-based arguments), treats all persons as moral equals, and is not futile, not likely to incur great difficulty or costs, and does not produce blind conformity at the expense of independence of mind and the spirit of free choice.

Bridging the Gap: Toward a Theory of Liberal Sex Education in Plural Society

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[84] See George's essay "God's Reasons" in *The Clash of Orthodoxies* to understand his scientific objection to abortion.
[85] George (1995), 43.

Sex education, although it is not a panacea for all of society's ills, is a useful and promising tool the state may use to promote autonomy, morality, and sexual health. Children in liberal democracies have an interest in developing into autonomous and moral human beings who are treated and treat others as having inherent dignity and moral worth. All citizens should have the benefit of the kind of education that will assist them in living lives that are healthful, freely chosen, dignified, and self-directed. This is a perspective that is shared by natural law traditionalists and Millian anti-traditionalists – one that moves us a good way toward developing the rough outlines of a sex education model that vindicates aspects of each account of the proper role the state may play in educating young people about sex.

Finding the right balance between autonomy-promotion and sensitivity to diverse ethical convictions is the most significant challenge to creating sex education programs that would garner support from members across the ideological spectrum, do justice to children's interests, and be defensible in a liberal democracy. Promoting individual autonomy along with an abiding respect for the right of others also to be sexually autonomous *does* necessitate the teaching of accurate facts related to biology, reproduction, reproductive rights, and contraception; an emphasis on self-ownership and worth; and critical inquiry into gender relations, sexual norms, family life, and so forth. This should occur over time, graduated to the developmental stages of children and adolescents and becoming more pronounced during high school. To this extent, the anti-traditionalist case for sex education, one that emphasizes objective facts, detailed information related to the prevention of disease and pregnancy, and independent moral evaluation, is vindicated. However, because George, and natural law theory in general, advocates the perfection of reason and the idea of the informed conscience, this "concession" to the anti-traditionalists should be welcomed in large part by natural law adherents. Yet, this is not the end of the story.

Earlier I argued that the most attractive anti-traditionalist argument for sex education would heed the following warning, that "[w]e should be careful not to conceive of [autonomy] in

such an exalted fashion that [it] becomes indistinguishable from caprice, and we should not be so eager for our children to attain autonomy that we fail to give it adequate developmental support."[86] Recognizing that the majority of students who are enrolled in sex education classes are probably not sexually autonomous to any significant degree, we now have to consider the considerable implications of this state of affairs for sex education design and pedagogy. It may very well be that non- or semi-autonomous youth who are unable to engage in considered and thoughtful sexual decision-making would benefit the most from *clear directives* about what is and what is not sexually appropriate for individuals their age. Abstinence-only programs seem to be illiberal since they fail to do justice to the interests of adolescents and teenagers who are *already* sexually active and need to be made aware of the methods available for safer sex in the interest of their health and the well-being of others. However, sex education that promotes abstinence or the postponement of sexual intercourse (especially among younger teens and adolescents) may be necessary to protect children's longer term interest in autonomy and sexual health. The state should work, therefore, to limit the sexual activity of non-autonomous minors through an emphasis on abstinence, but in a way that does not hamper their future autonomy (i.e. scare tactics[87] and/or the preservation of ignorance will not do). Unlike the Victorian approach of the past, which used "scientific" and moral persuasion to ensure the conformity of the unmarried with socially approved behaviors, this approach is targeted toward younger teens and children, and in conjunction with the dissemination of age-appropriate information, the promotion of self-esteem, and the inculcation of critical analysis skills over time. To this extent, the traditionalist concern that sex education not treat adolescents and children as if they are adults capable of making reasonable and autonomous decisions about their sexual behavior is vindicated. Moreover, this approach takes seriously the mutually shared belief among traditionalists and anti-traditionalists,

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[86] Blustein, Jeffrey. *Parents and Children: The Ethics of the Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 136.

who each draw from different intellectual resources, in the value of child citizens developing into independent, moral, empathetic, reasonable, and autonomous adults who contribute to their own and others' well-being.

Sex education, in order to successfully facilitate reasonable sexual deliberation, personal autonomy, and consideration for the autonomy of others, ought also to occur in an environment in which controversial issues of the day related to sexual behavior and morality are discussed freely and openly. In line with the democratic pluralism that characterizes liberal society, students must be permitted to discuss contentious issues in the context of a sex education classroom that is respectful yet permissive of potentially passionate ethical debate. Aspects of the sex education model employed in Swedish schools point to ways in which teachers can help oversee and contribute to classroom discussions of this nature.

The sex education model endorsed by Sweden promotes "'democratic principles of tolerance, partnership and equality of rights'... 'respect for truth and justice, for the dignity of man, for the inviolability of human life'"[88] as well as the importance of autonomy not only in sexual decision-making but also in thinking about the value and role of sexuality in one's own life. Swedish sex educators are asked to present a fair and accurate picture of the ethical landscape about divisive matters such as abortion, homosexuality, and sex outside of marriage. One author provides an example of this approach: "The teacher is expected to endorse sexual fidelity within a regular relationship...However, in terms of facts, it is also necessary to reveal that this is an area of differing values, as some regard permanent fidelity as God-given; others that it is desirable, socially/psychologically; others that it is unnecessary and unrealistic to desire such fidelity."[89] Since there has never been and is unlikely to be a universally agreed to

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[87] Scaring children into conformity with our expectations of their sexuality (whether well-meaning or not) will do little to promote wise sexual decision-making in the long term and nothing to inculcate in them an abiding respect for the sexual autonomy of their fellow citizens.
[88] Quoted in Meredith, 108.
[89] Meredith, 110.

"epistemological consensus on what constitutes an objectively superior sexual morality,"[90] this approach to discussions about sexual morality seems appropriate.

How might this kind of approach address the issue of sexual orientation, a particularly divisive issue for traditionalists and anti-traditionalists? Clearly, autonomy-promoting sex education cannot be indifferent to the potentially divergent sexual orientations of students.[91] Failure to provide homosexual students with information germane to their specific sexual experiences is discriminatory on its face. Avoidance of the issue in the sex education classroom is fundamentally illiberal in that it unjustifiably denies the reality that "the average classroom will be characterized by at least some degree of diversity with respect to sexual orientation,"[92] and sexual minorities are entitled to be educated under the conditions of autonomy. Unfortunately, currently only nine U.S. states mention homosexuality in their sex education policies, with only two of the nine (Massachusetts and New Jersey) requiring discussion of sexual orientation in the classroom. South Carolina bans it entirely, Utah proscribes the "advocacy of homosexuality," and five states require that it be treated as a behavior that is "abnormal and dangerous."[93] On the local level, it is reported that nearly half of schools do not mention homosexuality at any time in the sex education they provide to students.[94] As with so many sensitive topics related to sex education, educators shy away from discussion of sexual orientation out of anxiety over the potential for community backlash, parental protests, administrative scolding, and even loss of their jobs.

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[90] McKay, 109.

[91] Here I focus exclusively on homosexuality and heterosexuality. Certainly, there are other categories of sexual orientation or identity that could plausibly be dealt with (e.g. bisexuals and transgender persons), yet it would seem an unjustifiable administrative burden to have school sex educators deal with all the possible sexual preferences of the citizenry.

[92] McKay, 164.

[93] AGI. "State-Level Policies on Sexuality, STD Education," *Issues in Brief*, 2001 Series, No. 5. State-Level Policies," 4.

[94] Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. "Most Secondary Schools Take a More Comprehensive Approach to Sex Education," December 14, 1999 News Release, http://www.kff.org/content/1999/1560/PressReleasesexed.htm, 7/30/02, 2.

All students, gay or straight, need to be equipped with the factual knowledge that will help them to make considered sexual choices. They also need to learn a basic tenet of liberal democracies – that in an open society characterized by deep diversity, reasoned, if ardent, disagreement goes hand-in-hand with a profound respect for the fundamental equality of other citizens. Consequently, liberal sex education should promote the demonstration of tolerance even under circumstances in which one feels strong moral disapproval for the sexual conduct of others, for example, refraining from persecuting or attacking homosexuals despite a strong moral conviction that same-sex sexuality is improper, degrading, or even an affront to God. This is a core liberal value that sex education that cares about autonomy and justice cannot do without.

Certainly, homosexual behavior (along with similarly contentious issues like abortion and non-marital sex) ought not to be presented as morally non-controversial; rather, the question of the morality of homosexuality is left open as one of several controversial matters to be discussed and debated in the classroom. More than a student free-for-all is required here. Following the Swedish model, students should learn that some consider homosexuality immoral and debasing due to their own religious or ethical beliefs about what is humanly valuable (such as George), while the psychological and medical community overwhelmingly considers it a healthy, normal way of life. In this way, students may, as they develop their own ability to reason and act autonomously, weigh the arguments for themselves and form their own considered views. Similarly, students should be apprised of their reproductive rights and educated about the various forms of contraception available to them, along with accurate success and failure rates, while at the same time learning that although most people advocate the use of birth control, some religious organizations and individual citizens oppose it, and also that there is a significant and heated debate regarding the morality of abortion related to the question of when human life begins.

Certainly, the success of any sex education program depends upon the presence of an informed, thoughtful teacher who is able to help children think through ideas in a reflective and mutually respectful way. This should be buttressed by a safe school environment and a strong,

no-nonsense, supportive body of school administrators. However, even under less than ideal circumstances, it is naïve to suggest that school-sponsored sex education ought to be abandoned. After all, children of all ages hear and learn about sex (and witness sexual exploitation) in hallways, locker rooms, movie theaters, video arcades, magazines, and in front of television sets. Even the imperfect sex education classroom might be said at least to offer a distinctive, and more measured, approach to educating young citizens about sex than these unfortunate alternatives.

A Principled Consensus

Despite their many and serious differences, by analyzing the roots of anti-traditionalist and traditionalist perspectives and highlighting their key tenets, we can discover a significant (if not all-encompassing) overlapping consensus on how we ought to educate child citizens in liberal democracies about sex. The existence of real ethical pluralism need not be viewed as an insurmountable obstacle to designing a sex education program able to garner support across the ideological spectrum. The following principles reflect this consensus and indicate a possible meeting ground for liberals and natural law theorists who support state-sponsored sex education. It is worth emphasizing that these are general principles that allow for a range of morally permissible policies that may result from democratic processes.

1. Each individual, once assisted in acquiring the information, evaluative skills, and character traits conducive to autonomy, ought to exercise his or her own autonomy in sexual matters.
2. While sexual choice-making is at the discretion of such an individual, it, like other kinds of choice-making, is benefited by the promotion of reason, autonomy, and morality, as well as the understanding that with freedom comes significant responsibilities to others.
3. All individuals, recognizing the equal moral value of all persons in society (however much one might disapprove of their behavior) ought to demonstrate respect for the sexual autonomy of others, provided their demonstration of autonomy does not cause undue harm to others.
4. Sexual identity is a constituent component of self-identity. Sexual activity that is exploitative, degrading to one's self-worth, or treats individuals as means rather than as ends in themselves is to be strongly discouraged.
5. State paternalism in the realm of sexuality may be justified when it is directed toward non- or semi-autonomous youth who require clear directives because of various incompetencies, is based on sound moral reasoning, treats all persons as moral equals, is not futile, and does not produce blind conformity at the expense of independence of mind and the spirit of free choice.
6. As a reflection of the ethical pluralism characteristic of liberal society, young citizens ought to be educated about sex in an environment in which differing, sometimes incommensurable, views about sexual behavior and morality are openly discussed, reflected upon, and evaluated. This kind of approach should be designed such that it is conducive to the development of reason, mutual respect, personal responsibility, and autonomy.

Although I have attempted to show that, in principle, sex education can be responsive to those who subscribe to liberalism and natural law while safeguarding children's interests, undoubtedly, there will always be citizens (on both sides of the divide) who will be offended or disappointed by particular aspects of this approach. Liberal sex education, in the end, may have few supporters and many detractors who seek to have their own moral perspectives dominant in the classroom. Many traditionalists, such as one educator who asserts that "there are certain issues that I consider closed because they are true [since they are based on] the infallible word of God,"[95] may resent and protest against the promotion of an egalitarian, secular morality, the provision of timely and detailed information pertaining to sex, and the advocacy of a kind of independent thinking that may place absolute parental and religious authority in question. Such citizens will continue to be dissatisfied and, to that extent, the model I have laid out is unsuccessful. However, accommodation of theistic perspectives that extol psychological insularity and reject the values of autonomy and equality cannot be achieved without undermining the basic interests of child citizens. This is morally intolerable. That said, those who adhere to the natural law perspective, despite their disapproval of particular forms of sexual behavior, have good reason based on their own intellectual tradition to encourage this very kind of approach because of its important contribution to the development of reason, deliberative decision-making, autonomy, and personal responsibility.

A number of anti-traditionalists undoubtedly will lament classroom discussion of religious views (including fundamentalist, Muslim, and "far right" perspectives) on matters like homosexuality, gender relations, and abortion, along with the implementation of clear moral directives for younger teens and adolescents. But, as George notes, "unlimited freedom is the enemy, not the friend, of everyone's well-being,"[96] and this is especially true for non- or semi-autonomous youth considering engaging in sexual activities. Moreover, along with sexual, racial,

[95] James Carper, quoted in Zimmerman, 220.
[96] George (1995), 40.

and gender diversity comes religious and moral diversity, and this, like the others, often plays a constitutive role in citizens' lives. Genuine autonomy is benefited by an ample knowledge of various and competing belief systems (including those based on sectarian commitments), as well as ethical debates and disagreements. Without a doubt, exposure to this kind of sex education may cause spillover effects into students' developing conceptions of the good, which may become informed by the school's and other students' treatment of various facets of sexuality. This is not to be lamented since "liberal democracy at its best, in education as in other social endeavours, will not leave everything as it is."[97]

Certainly, liberal public morality and the promotion of autonomy are *not* exhaustive of the moral domain. There may be other distinctive moral educational ends that parents, other citizens, and the state wish to promote. However, the liberal state is not only justified in promoting the values that will safeguard the prospective interest in autonomy of its young citizens, but it is obligated to do so. At its best, autonomy-promoting sex education will better the health, reasoning, empathy, and morality of the next generation. Although liberal sex education may not be optimal from the standpoint of achieving commonly desired ends (like a maximum reduction in teen pregnancy and STDs) *by any means necessary*, it will make the greatest strides it can - working to create citizens able to make sexual decisions in an autonomous, responsible, and moral fashion while demonstrating respect for the right of diverse others to do likewise.

[97] Callan, 13.

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